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## Why Are Billfish Regulated by NMFS?

In 1997, the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) listed Atlantic blue marlin and Atlantic white marlin as overfished. In 1998, west Atlantic sailfish were added to the list of overfished species. NMFS recently completed Amendment 1 to the Atlantic Billfish Fishery Management Plan (FMP) to develop a rebuilding plan consistent with domestic and international obligations, as well as to ensure the long-term sustainability of Atlantic billfish stocks.

**Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1996:** Shifted fishery management in the United States to a precautionary approach to stop overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks.

**Atlantic Tunas Convention Act (ATCA) -** Provides the Secretary of Commerce with the necessary authority to implement ICCAT recommendations.

### **International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT)**

As an ICCAT member, the U.S. is obligated by ATCA to implement ICCAT recommendations approved by the United States. The 1997 ICCAT recommendation requires: reductions in landings of Atlantic marlins by at least 25% from 1996 levels, improvement in monitoring, data collection, and reporting procedures, as well as promotion of voluntary live release of Atlantic marlin.

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## What Are the Regulations that Impact Recreational Anglers?

**Effective May 24, 1999:**

### **Minimum Size Limits**

- Blue marlin: 99 inches LJFL\*
- White marlin: 66 inches LJFL\*
- Sailfish: 63 inches LJFL\*\*
- Retention of Longbill spearfish *is prohibited*

\* Size limits apply *throughout Atlantic Ocean* and adjacent waters to U.S. citizens and U.S. flagged vessels.

\*\* Size and retention limits apply shoreward of the outer boundary of the U.S. EEZ

**Effective July 1, 1999:**

**Tournament Registration** - A person responsible for maintaining records of participants and results used for awarding tournament points or prizes for Atlantic billfish, must register the tournament with NMFS at least four weeks prior to commencement. Call (727) 570-5447 to receive a registration form. NMFS will select

some tournaments for reporting. If you are selected, NMFS will send you a reporting form that must be returned to NMFS within 7 days after tournament fishing has been completed.

**Extension of Management Authority for Atlantic Marlins** - U.S. flagged vessels and U.S. citizens must comply with Atlantic blue and white marlin regulations throughout the Atlantic Ocean and adjacent waters.

**Release Methods** - Under new regulations, anglers are allowed to remove the hook from a billfish using a hook-removal device. However, fish below the minimum size can NOT be removed from the water, consistent with previous regulations.

**Catch-and-Release Fishery Management Program Established** - NMFS has established a recreational catch-and-release fishery management program for Atlantic billfish in recognition of the unique characteristics of the billfish fishery, including the conservation ethic of recreational billfish anglers which provides multiple recreational opportunities without adversely impacting the stock. Therefore, all Atlantic billfish released alive by anglers are not considered as bycatch.

**Fishing Year** - June 1 to May 31

**To Be Implemented At A Later Date:**

### Permits and Logbooks for

**Charter/Headboats** Charterboats and headboats targeting HMS species, including Atlantic billfish, will be required. You will be contacted in the near future regarding the time frame for the implementation of the new permit. NMFS will select a percentage of permitted charter/headboat to complete a logbook for each trip.

### Voluntary Observer Program for

**Charter/Headboats** - The voluntary observer program will be used by NMFS to more effectively monitor catch and release rates, and condition and survival of released fish. The voluntary program will begin following implementation of the charter/headboat permit.

### For More Information

Please contact:

Buck Sutter or Jill Stevenson  
Phone: 727-570-5447  
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# Atlantic Billfish

## What Are the Regulations?



### National Marine Fisheries Service

Office of Sustainable Fisheries  
Highly Migratory Species Division

